



## Asthma and Tobacco Use

### Fact Sheet

The single most important thing that you can do for your health and the health of others is to quit using tobacco.

Asthma affects the lungs and airways leading to the lungs making them very sensitive. Tobacco smoke irritates these already sensitive airways worsening the asthma and “triggering” asthma symptoms. When a person is exposed to a “trigger” they react by experiencing wheezing, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest and/or coughing.

Anyone can have asthma. In fact, asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States; affecting nearly 22 million people. In Kentucky, 10.6% of children 11 years of age and younger, 13.6% of middle school students, 11.8% of high school students, and 8.6% of adults currently have asthma.

Factors that can cause an asthma attack, also called triggers, include:

- Dust/dust mites/stuffed animals
- Diesel bus exhausts
- Tobacco smoke
- Air pollution
- Stress/emotions
- Chalk dust/dry eraser markers
- Pollens/mold
- Cockroach allergen
- Animals
- Exercise

#### ***Smoking with Asthma***

Cigarette smoke paralyzes and can even kill the tiny hairs called cilia that work to clean dust and mucous out of the airways. The damage to the cilia allows dust and mucous to accumulate blocking the airways. Smoke also causes the lungs to make more mucous than normal that can trigger an asthma attack.

#### ***Smoking during Pregnancy***

If a pregnant woman has asthma, smoking during pregnancy can increase the mother’s risk of having an asthma attack, which decreases the oxygen supply to the baby. Additionally, smoking during pregnancy can increase the child’s risk of developing asthma by age five, especially if both the mother and grandmother smoked during pregnancy.

#### ***Secondhand Smoke and Asthma***

Research shows there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. In fact, secondhand smoke can worsen asthma and directly cause an asthma attack. Children are more vulnerable to secondhand smoke. Because children have smaller airways than adults, they breathe faster and are more likely to breathe in more harmful chemicals per pound of their weight than an adult would during the same amount of time. Any household members that smoke and expose children to secondhand smoke increase the risk that a child will develop asthma. If a parent or guardian smokes, children will need to use their asthma medicine more often and there is an earlier onset of asthma among children whose parents or guardians smoke.

#### ***What should you do?***

If you or your child has asthma, the most important thing you can do for yourself and your child is to quit smoking. For help quitting tobacco call Quit Now Kentucky at 1-800-Quit Now (1-800-784-8669) or log on to [QuitNowKentucky.org](http://QuitNowKentucky.org). For more information about controlling and managing your asthma, talk with your health care professional.